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Israel confirms soldiers fired at car in which Hind Rajab was killed and opens criminal investigation

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Yolande Knell, Middle East correspondent, Jerusalem and **Lucy Williamson,** Middle East correspondent, Jerusalem

Family/Reuters

The Israeli military has confirmed for the first time that it opened fire on a car carrying five-year-old Palestinian girl Hind Rajab, who was killed along with six relatives in Gaza in 2024.

Rajab initially survived the attack and answered a telephone call during which she pleaded for help. The call lasted hours.

An ambulance sent to reach her – in a move co-ordinated with the Israeli army - was then shelled, killing two paramedics. Hind's body was recovered days later, along with the others killed.

In a statement, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said that it would open a criminal investigation into Hind and her family's killing, as well as the killing of 15 Palestinians, including medics and a UN worker, in March 2025.

Both incidents drew international condemnation.

The IDF said of the killing of Hind: "Due to alleged failures in the co-ordination of the movement of the Palestine Red Crescent ambulance, it has been decided to initiate a criminal investigation of the incident by Military Police Criminal Investigation Division."

It added that the findings of its examination "indicate that IDF troops fired at a vehicle" that was "travelling contrary to the advanced notice that had been published in an announcement by the IDF Spokesperson to residents of the area".

The IDF initially stated that none of its troops were in the area at the time of Hind's killing. However, that suggestion was soon questioned.

The IDF later said it had "conducted raids on terror targets" with forces operating in neighbourhoods in Gaza City, including Tel al-Hawa, where Hind was located.

Hind's killing was internationally condemned after a desperate recording of her speaking to paramedics of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) was broadcast around the world.

The sound of Hind's fragile voice on the other of the line that day haunted the Red Crescent operators long after her death, as she described seeing tanks directly in front of the car, moving towards her.

"Hide under the seats," the operators told her. "Don't let anyone see you."

Operator Rana Faqih stayed on the line with Hind for hours, as the Red Crescent team appealed to the Israeli army to allow their ambulance to access the location.

Faqih said the child appealed to her over and over again for someone to come and rescue her.

"At one point, she told me it was getting dark," Rana told the BBC in February 2024. "She was scared. She asked me how far away my house was. I felt paralysed and helpless."

Three hours after the call began, an ambulance was finally cleared to approach the area, and was despatched to rescue Hind.

It was after dark when the crew - Yusuf al-Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun - notified operators that they were nearing the location, and were about to be checked for entry by Israeli forces.

It was the last operators heard from them – or from Hind. After that, the line to both paramedics, and to the girl they came to rescue, disconnected for good.

The PRCS later confirmed that both Yusuf al-Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun were killed when the ambulance was bombed by Israeli forces.

"The [Israeli] occupation deliberately targeted the Red Crescent crew despite obtaining prior coordination to allow the ambulance to arrive at the scene to rescue the child Hind," the organisation said in a statement.

The story was made into an Oscar-nominated film called The Voice of Hind Rajab.

The UN cited her case in a commission of inquiry, accusing Israel of war crimes, which it denies.

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Aside from the criminal investigation into Hind, her family and the paramedics, the IDF also said it would investigate **the killing of 15 Palestinians**, after an IDF unit fired on ambulances, a

fire engine and a marked UN vehicle, in the Tal al-Sultan area of Rafah in southern Gaza during an emergency call-out early on 23 March 2025.

Their bodies were found buried in shallow graves a week later next to the crushed vehicles.

The Israeli military initially said its troops fired on "suspicious vehicles" driving in darkness with their headlights and emergency lights off.

But it later said that account was "mistaken" after a video found on the mobile phone of one of the dead paramedics, Rifaat Radwan, showed the convoy was using its emergency lights.

In Wednesday's statement, the IDF said: "Following review of the findings, having found that the firing conducted during the incident raises a reasonable suspicion of criminal misconduct, it has been decided to initiate a criminal investigation of the incident."

In three other cases, including the killing of **seven World Central Kitchen employees** in Deir al-Balah two years ago, and four employees of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), who were killed in two incidents, the IDF said it had not found grounds for criminal investigations.

The IDF's statement on Wednesday said: "For more than a thousand days, the IDF has been conducting intensive combat across numerous fronts, carrying out a wide range of military missions in an exceptionally complex operational reality.

"As part of the IDF's obligations under international law and Israeli domestic

law, the IDF examines exceptional incidents that occurred during combat."

The IDF is under pressure to show it investigates itself to try to stave off international legal action, most notably from the International Criminal Court.

It aims to counter accusations that it has committed war crimes and that there is impunity for its forces.

However, Israeli rights groups say that criminal investigations of Israeli forces rarely lead to convictions.

Ziv Stahl, executive director of Israeli human rights group Yesh Din, told the BBC that "almost no indictments are filed in relation to the number of complaints against soldiers and commanders for offenses committed.

"In the even more rare cases where soldiers or commanders are convicted, they receive disproportionately lenient sentences that bear little relation to the severity of the offenses."

Correction: The initial version of this story and breaking news notification said Hind Rajab was aged six. The copy was updated after it was later confirmed she was aged five

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